



Tuesday, February 17, 2009

## NEWS: Holocaust Rescue

*Rabbis urge Yad Vashem to recognize 1943 rabbinic march on White House.*

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*New York*

More than 400 rabbis, including senior leaders of all denominations, have signed a petition urging Yad Vashem, Israel's central Holocaust museum, to add materials recognizing the 1943 rabbis' march to the White House and other Holocaust protests organized by the Bergson Group.

Rabbi Miller

Local signers include: Rabbi Jason Miller of Oakland County-based Tamarack Camps and Congregation T'chiyah, Oak Park;

Rabbi Bennett

Rabbis Joshua Bennett, Jennifer Kaluzny and Marla Hornsten of Temple Israel, West Bloomfield; Rabbi Norman Roman of Temple Kol Ami, West Bloomfield; Rabbi David Nelson, Congregation Beth Shalom, Oak Park; Rabbi Amy Bigman, Congregation Shaarey

Zedek, East Lansing.

Rabbi Miller studied the Bergson Group as a student in Professor Kenneth Waltzer's Holocaust course at James Madison College at Michigan State University.

"We discussed the significant role played by American rabbis in not only turning the attention of the American public to the atrocities of the Nazi regime, but also putting the necessary pressure on the Roosevelt administration to try to rescue Europe's Jews," Miller said. "Yad Vashem should include the actions of these American rabbis in their memorial."

He added, "These Jewish leaders rallied, protested and met with senior U.S. politicians with the noble mission of ending the silence of our ancestors' persecution at the hands of the Nazis."

The actions these rabbis took during the Holocaust helped inspire him to become a rabbi, Miller said. "It showed me that the purpose of rabbinic leadership is not merely to teach and preach, but also to stand up for a cause and to fight for justice."

Rabbi Bennett believes it is important to recognize the actions of Jews who responded to the Holocaust, especially today when activism seems to be on the wane. "I hope to motivate young people to care, to act and to make change happen," he said. "By remembering the actions of past Jewish American leaders, we are inspired to emulate them in the present."

The petition was delivered to Rabbi Yisrael Meir Lau of Yad Vashem during his visit to New York City to address the United Nations on International Holocaust Remembrance Day on Jan. 27.

The petition was organized by the Washington-based David S. Wyman Institute for Holocaust Studies. It was spearheaded by Rabbi Haskel Lookstein, one of the first historians to write about the rabbis' march, and Rabbi Benyamin Kamenetzky, dean emeritus of the South Shore (Long Island) Yeshiva who was one of the marchers in 1943.

"The rabbis' march was the only rally for rescue of Europe's Jews that was held in the nation's capital during the Holocaust," the petition states. "The march and the Bergson Group's other protests - rallies, lobbying in Washington, and hundreds of newspaper advertisements - helped shatter the silence surrounding the Holocaust and put pressure on the Roosevelt administration to take rescue action. These efforts played an important role in bringing about the creation of the U.S. government's War Refugee Board, which helped save more than 200,000 Jews from Hitler."

"Yad Vashem already includes material pertaining to various aspects of the Allies' disappointing response to the Holocaust," the petition points out. "Visitors to Yad Vashem need to know that, although too many people were silent during the Holocaust, there were some who spoke out. Publicizing this fact can help inspire future generations to speak out against injustice."

Signatories include Rabbi Eric Yoffie, president of the New York-based Union for Reform Judaism; Rabbi Daniel Nevins, dean of the Conservative movement's Jewish Theological Seminary in New York City and former spiritual leader of Adat Shalom Synagogue in Farmington Hills; and Orthodox Rabbi Dr. Norman Lamm, chancellor of Yeshiva University, New York City. Another notable signer was Franklin D. Roosevelt's great-grandson, Rabbi Joshua Boettiger.

*JN Editor Robert Sklar contributed to this report.*

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